



Saskatchewan
Agriculture
and Food

Farm & Food Report

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Saskatchewan

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Log Number: 07-36-169
Week of September 3, 2007

FNACS SPURRING FIRST NATIONS INTEREST IN AGRICULTURE

A provincial funding contribution of \$150,000 will enable the First Nations Agricultural Council of Saskatchewan (FNACS) to continue building and promoting educational programming that fosters agricultural development in First Nations communities.

Deanne Kasokeo, FNACS Youth Education Program Co-ordinator, says the council's intent is to increase agricultural awareness and appreciation among First Nations youth by making it a focus of their school curriculum.

"We're trying to encourage First Nations youth to go into agricultural careers by exposing, educating and making them aware of the agricultural industry here in Saskatchewan," Kasokeo said.

"FNACS acts as a liaison between the 86 First Nations schools in the province. We have a number of educational resources that we are able to provide to them, and we send out materials as requested on various topics, which then become part of the curriculum in those schools."

Kasokeo says FNACS regularly collaborates with the Saskatchewan branch of Agriculture in the Classroom, an industry-sponsored organization that provides tools and supports to enable greater agricultural programming in the education sector.

"We partnered to introduce a 'Little Green Thumbs' project for First Nations students around the grade five level to grow indoor gardens," she stated. "It was a terrific project, very educational and very well received by the kids."

Kasokeo says the provincial funding is a big boost to FNACS, and will be used by the group to support the provision of further education, training and development programming.

"The Traditional Knowledge Curriculum is one of our programs that we're currently researching and developing," she noted. "Through it, we intend to incorporate traditional First Nations knowledge about land, resources and the environment for our youth to access."

For Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), the good work of FNACS made its funding decision fairly easy.

"The Government of Saskatchewan is very interested in the development of youth and the development of First Nations and their capabilities in the agricultural area," said Lyle Stavness, SAF's Manager of Farm Business Management Services, "so it's a natural fit for us to provide some funding support to the programs that FNACS is organizing to promote that kind of development in the sector."

Kasokeo says FNACS will keep working hard to achieve its mandate of "developing a strong, viable and sustainable agricultural sector both on and off the reserve for status Indians in the province of Saskatchewan."

In her view, "That includes educating young people and making them aware of opportunities on the land. It includes delivering programs and services right to the First Nations communities in areas like renewal, environmental farm planning and co-operative development. And it includes working with the Saskatchewan 4-H Council to continue establishing clubs in First Nations communities across the province."

More information on the First Nations Agricultural Council of Saskatchewan can be found on the group's website at www.fnacs.ca.

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SWEET SMELL OF GARLIC MEANS EXPANSION FOR FOOD PROCESSOR

If you are a garlic fan, you would probably love to meet Dave and Krista McBain. They are the owners of M and M Garlic, an operation which grows and processes vegetables on the McBain farm in the White Fox area near Lake Tobin.

After nearly a decade in business, they are on the edge of a major expansion.

"We started out about nine or 10 years ago, just growing garlic and trying to sell it as a raw vegetable," said Dave McBain, "but we found we were too far away from the markets. So we started processing some powdered and pickled garlic. We've been processing for six years, and now we're doing other vegetables like asparagus, tomatoes, peppers, beans and cucumbers."

The McBains plant about 10 acres in vegetables, including a single acre of garlic that satisfies all of their commercial needs. They also operate a six-quarter grain farm with the assistance of their two children who still live at home.

The M and M Garlic product line includes pickled versions of just about every vegetable imaginable, including garlic, carrots, asparagus and even their own line of salsa. The processed garlic comes in many forms, such as Crunchie Pickled Garlic, Dill Pickled Garlic, Fresh Minced Garlic, Hot and Spicy Pickled Garlic, Sweet and Spicy Garlic, and, for the truly adventurous, a preparation known as The Fire Escape.

"We got a couple of recipes from other people, but we mostly just made them up as we went along," McBain said of their specialty foods. "Right now, our fresh minced garlic is our best seller."

The processing operation is currently located in a 30-foot by 40-foot building which is federally inspected to meet international standards. It includes storage areas for both raw vegetables and finished product, as well as the main cooking area.

"The work is manual. It's like a big family kitchen," McBain said. "The biggest food preparation container will produce about 90 jars of finished product."

Dave and Krista do most of the work themselves, with some assistance from neighbours during the busiest periods.

Finding the market for their pickled goods has not been difficult, but getting the product there is a little more challenging.

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"If we go to a trade show with a new product, everybody buys it," McBain stated. "We have people phoning and ordering because they've used it and they want more. One woman buys cases of product to sell at a stand on the Trans Canada Highway. She always sells out."

The products of M and M Garlic are available at about 20 retail locations in Saskatchewan and two in Alberta. They can also be purchased online at the Saskatchewan Made website, www.saskmade.ca.

Success has led to the need for more space, so the McBains have begun construction of a new 50-foot by 80-foot building.

"We bought a garlic peeler and a cracker which cracks the bulbs into cloves," McBain said. "It's a pretty big machine that requires a special power supply, so we needed a larger building. We also needed more covered space to dry the garlic crop."

According to McBain, the biggest challenges as a food processor are the strict labelling and inspection requirements, and getting the product to market. He is proud of the business he and Krista have built through their hard work, and the results have only encouraged the couple to invest in growth for the future.

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SAFE COMMUNITY PROGRAM EXTENDS INTO THE COUNTRY

A Safe Communities Program in Saskatchewan plans to focus special attention on one of the province's most injury-prone occupations: farming.

The coalition "Safe Communities Humboldt and Area" was formed in 2003 to better co-ordinate activities aimed at preventing injuries to infants, children and youth. Its members were initially drawn from the police, ambulance, fire, education and health service sectors.

Over time, the organization received support and funding from the Saskatchewan Safety Council, the Saskatoon Health Region, Canadian National Railway, SGI and Safe Kids Canada, as well as local businesses, municipal bodies, service clubs and other community-based organizations.

"The injury prevention initiatives this group has fostered have steadily increased over the years," said Collette Lessmeister, the Program Co-ordinator for the organization. Among its successes have been bicycle helmet awareness and passenger safety promotional activities, a Safe Watch newsletter and a pilot project entitled P.A.R.T.Y. (Prevent Alcohol and Risk-related Trauma in Youth), which was initiated in 2004 and expanded every year since.

There are now 10 different partner groups that work together on safety initiatives for the community of Humboldt and the surrounding area, aided by many volunteers and sponsors who make the programs possible. The program co-ordinator position was created to help organize the group's efforts to make the region a safer place to live, learn, work and play.

"Like most Safe Community Programs that start up across Saskatchewan, the reach of the Humboldt and area group extends far beyond the city's borders," Lessmeister said. "It has grown to become a very effective and very beneficial promoter of safety initiatives that are important to the surrounding region in areas like agriculture and rural development."

The coalition plans to step up its efforts in the countryside by forming a Farm Safety group made up of local producers, which will help to develop and deliver farm safety training programs to both rural and urban residents. It also plans to hold a Farm Safety Day in the spring in which local schools will be involved in interactive farm safety demonstrations.

"Our group has always recognized agriculture as an important part of the community, and we know that developing safe working habits at a young age pays off well into the future," Lessmeister said.

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“The impact of farm injuries sometimes has more than just a short-term result. It can often affect a producer’s ability to earn an income for years to come, and that’s a situation we want to prevent.”

Statistics show the group may have its work cut out for it. In an average year in Saskatchewan, there are 18 farm-related fatalities and 200 injuries requiring hospitalization. Those numbers put farming and ranching very high on the list of the province’s most hazardous occupations.

It’s a daunting task, but if past performance is any indicator, Safe Communities Humboldt and Area is up for the challenge.

More information on the group and its safety initiatives can be found online at www.safehumboldtarea.ca or by calling Collette Lessmeister at (306) 682-0705.

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CONSTRUCTED WETLANDS HELP PROTECT WATER SOURCES

Increasing environmental concern has generated a greater focus on water quality across Canada, and many industries are making an effort to better protect water sources.

The livestock industry is a vital part of the Saskatchewan economy, and Jared Ward, an Environmental Engineer with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), says the sector is likewise taking a leading role in safeguarding water sources. One approach that is gaining interest is the "constructed wetland" concept.

"Rainfall and snowmelt draining from livestock facilities can pick up manure, bacteria and nutrients, which can potentially end up in downstream water bodies, streams and groundwater sources," Ward said. "Constructed wetlands can offer an effective and low-maintenance option for the treatment of this runoff water."

A constructed wetland is a shallow, earthen basin planted with rooted, emergent wetland vegetation. It can clean and purify wastewater by incorporating microbes, fungi, algae and wetland plants that either reduce or transform pollutants.

Constructed wetland technology has become an established treatment method for municipal and livestock wastewater in many provinces in Canada. Ward says Saskatchewan has gained experience using this type of technology in the municipal waste industry.

"One example is the SaskPower constructed wetland built in 1994 near the City of Estevan," he noted. "This wetland purifies the city's secondary sewage wastewater, eliminating the semi-annual release of the lagoons to the environment. It also provides marsh habitat for a variety of wildlife."

Hoping to duplicate the successes achieved in the management of municipal wastewater, SAF, in conjunction with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), is developing a pilot constructed wetland project for the treatment of livestock waste. The project will provide valuable information on the design and operation of wetlands for Saskatchewan's livestock sector.

"We're very optimistic that constructed wetlands can offer a cost-effective treatment of livestock runoff water," said Serena McIver, an Environmental Engineer with AAFC. "They've been shown to reduce nutrients and suspended solids, bacteria, viruses and heavy metals by 70 to 90 per cent."

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McIver says constructed wetlands have the potential to deliver many benefits, including nutrient reduction, odour control, water quality improvement, wildlife enhancement and aesthetic improvement. They can also provide economic benefits by reducing maintenance and labour costs, and decreasing the required land application area.

Costs associated with constructing a wetland depend on a number of factors, most importantly the volume of water to be treated and its initial quality.

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ETHANOL AND FEED THE FOCUS OF WESTERN NUTRITION CONFERENCE

The rapidly expanding demand for ethanol feedstock and the impact this growing market will have on animal feed is at the centre of the 2007 Western Nutrition Conference.

The 28th annual edition of the conference will take place from September 25 to 27 in Saskatoon.

The conference always attracts a diverse audience, according to one of its co-chairs, Dr. Murray Drew.

"It's primarily one of the meetings that brings together industry people with university people. A lot of researchers at western universities will participate," Drew said.

The 200 to 250 delegates expected to attend the conference will examine and discuss the impact of increasing ethanol production on animal feeding from a number of different perspectives.

"We've tried to put together a program that addresses a wide swath of issues in terms of how this is going to affect the feeding of animals," Drew noted. "We think of ethanol as something that goes in cars, but of course what's going to happen is that the wheat and barley we used to feed to livestock will also now be going to ethanol production, so we're going to have to deal with byproducts of ethanol in a bigger way than before."

Sessions addressing that topic include: Competition for Food, Feed and Fuel – The Great Opportunity with the Biorefinery Concept; The Impact of Changes in the Ethanol Production on the Nutritional Value of Wheat Distillers Dried Grains; and Wheat Based Distillers Grains for Growing and Finishing Cattle.

"I think that it's going to be very interesting in terms of the ethanol production," said Drew. "We've brought together a significant number of speakers from both the U.S. and Canada on the topic."

The conference will be kicked off with the J.M. Bell Memorial Lecture, which this year will examine "The Role of Research in Advancing Animal Agriculture in the 21st Century." The lecture will be delivered by Dr. John Black, who, Drew notes, has had an illustrious career in animal nutrition in Australia.

"We sometimes feel that we do research forever and it never really amounts to anything," Drew stated. "(Black's) talk is going to be on how research has directly affected the way that we feed animals and produce meat."

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Among the many technical sessions are quality assurance in the feed industry, feed mill management strategies, taste aversion in grazing animals, and new developments in feeding high performance pigs and chickens.

“We’ve got some interesting speakers coming from across North America and around the world, so I think it will give people a different perspective than they normally have on the way we feed animals,” Drew said.

The Western Nutrition Conference is a joint project of the University of Saskatchewan and the Animal Nutrition Association of Canada. Complete information on the 2007 edition is available at www.westernnutritionconference.com.

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